

TOWARDS A CHRONOTOPOS DEVELOPING AUTOGRAPHIC MEDIA TO EXAMINE TRANSITORY MOMENTS OF ARCHITECTURE

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Keywords: experiential spatial qualities, autographic drawing

TRANSITIONS OF AND IN ARCHITECTURE

In today's urban environments, sited in network, the notion of place, as described by Marc Augé [1] and Michel de Certeau [2] has a reduced capacity to acquire 'stability' or apply the idea of absolute emplacement. Typically, when we analyse sites within the contemporary metropolis, we aim at understanding their identities through exploring relations of proximity, connecting a network of information such as local climate and socio-historical data with newly designed form, in order to generate contextual relevance for its new spatial conditions. A place, as defined by Marc Augé [1] and Michel de Certeau [2] is relational to its surrounding and its history. Yet in these current environments of 'connective-ness', where a multitude of indigenous elements start to overlap and intersect, relational proximity starts to show signs of an absolute vastness. Where Marc Augé describes the emergent phenomenon of non-places [1] as a result of these global mediated conditions, we aim to put forward the idea of rescaling the concept of place and the way we assume emplacement as architects.

"Architectures that were once specific and local have become interchangeable and global; national identity has seemingly been sacrificed to modernity", Rem Koolhaas states in his role as director of the Venice Architecture Biennale 2014.

With this paper we describe a challenging force to this state of modernity in the form of a critical commentary on our exhibition at the Venice Architecture Biennale 2014 where we examine transitory moments of and in architecture. More in particular, we explore the possibilities of the continuation of historical experiential spatial qualities through a practice of replay; in this particular case by using drawing and film.

EXPRESSING DURATION AS A SPATIAL QUALITY

As partners of an architecture practice our individual work indeed shares common ground both in terms of concepts used and methods followed however different the aesthetic outcomes might be. In our work we both use drawing and film as

representational tools to experiment with the concept of repetition, a concept we will eventually refer to as replay. In doing so we escape a scholarly landscape of memory theory to actively search for useful overlaps between indeed a scholarship of memory and a scholarship of vitalism [3]. Our interest in memory is thus not entrenched in pursuing acts of conservation and tradition. When we speak of continuing historical experiential spatial qualities, we carefully act through tactics of duration and repetition to allow memory to be subjected to a variety of transformational forces. The act of repetition is thus subjected to conversion as opposed to conservation to engender what one could call architecture of becoming as opposed to architecture of being (with a certain Deleuzian connotation). The trajectory force in this instance is thus more oriented towards the future than it is towards the past, clearly without denying the importance of the past since we hold a lingering desire for the long-gone. When we speak of working through the past we refer to something more explicit than the obvious use or bringing forward of older concepts without which we could not live our daily lives.

Like Constantin Constantius [4] we find ourselves trying to regain sensations and impressions from a past; not just our own but the past of any site anywhere in the world. Very much like Constantin Constantius we find that no such thing is possible; in that a repeated experience is a new experience in reference to the old and never ever equal or even remotely similar. Sensations and impressions cannot be regained as they were; as one would hold time in detention in a representation of the past without allowing the world to continue its ever-changing momentum. Repetition, as defined by Kierkegaard, has indeed this significant property in that there can only be repetition through change. This understanding of generating difference through repetition opens up new exploratory roots of investigation into more profound understandings of innovation and change. Of course we undergo an uncompromising force towards the future; our grinning faces gleam in the brightness of the future. However, as the mother of all inventions walks her ancestral paths, modernism has allowed (but is not fully responsible) for a flattening, an erasure of topography and has offered us the highroad. Here we trace our scope for architecture; sustaining these urges for progress without the amplified need for fast semi-automated industrialized architecture. Instead we want to recognize the potency, the implicit sense of duration memory holds.

TIME

As previously termed in a paper titled 'inevitable reconstructions'; "*... we acknowledge history as a network of intersecting timelines suggesting something resembling a fabric of history as opposed to a merely linear thread. This allows us to look at architecture*

through multiple histories where it becomes increasingly more difficult to think outside or after history and much more appealing to sustain within its mesh of time..." [5].

Time in this instance is perceived as a force on which multiple pasts; memories and chronicles drift simultaneously and interdependently. As such we observe the status of the past as a positive presence that sustains the momentum of actuality.

Henri Bergson opposes the concept of time and our consciousness in that time to be defined as a linear construct of divisible instants such as hours, minutes and seconds [3].

This Newtonian understanding of time as quantified segments does not allow us to understand or even come in contact with the qualitative nature of time and our being conscious of that time. For example; every time I enter the interior of the Duomo in Milan I experience an overall experience of contentment and awe. Walking through a field of gigantic stone pillars this feeling cannot be subdivided in moments. One experiential moment of walking along the nave continues into a next experience of walking along the transept windows without clear boundaries or identifiable margins between these experiences. Bergson defines this as duration; a progression of qualitative changes allowing one to impact the other. Joel McKim [3] provides us with an account of what Bergson and Deleuze unravel as an elaborate structure of time and addresses two very different kinds of past; on the one hand he accounts for a past that was once present such as me walking past the transept windows of the Duomo. On the other, he explains the existence of an a-priori past into which the former present can drift. This pure-past pre-exists the passing present and forms a repository for all former presents to exist in a virtual state of coexistence [6]. Deleuze writes; "*it is the whole, integral past; it is all our past, which coexists with each present*" (Deleuze 1991, 59). It is precisely because of this co-occurrence of past and present that one can never repeat an event from the past without significantly changing the experience of this. This also explains the impossibility of reclaiming or reconstructing the 'original meaning' of any historic event or object, as many art historians have attempted to do.

So how can we work productively from an inevitable present through memories of past events? Bergson and Deleuze explain the process of remembering through a double act of expansion and contraction taking place in what they refer to as the pure-past. Bergson describes the first act of remembering as an expanding action; bringing oneself into the realm of the pure-past in which all past events coexist in reference to the presence. Here one enters a simultaneous-ness of all time past; a duration of monumental vastness. The second act would be a movement through a specific event one wants to recollect. This is possible, as Deleuze describes, through an action of compression; through which the entirety of the past remains present yet in a contracted form and positioned towards this

specific event. It is only via the pure-past the recollection of past events into the present can be enabled.

The Gate Drawings (fig1) and *The Keepers Cenotaph* (fig 2) want to indeed illustrate a practice of creativity through a process of recollection as opposed to following a practice of reaffirming existing historical interpretations. We do this by allowing our projects to take form in fields of site-specific relations drawn as lines; cutting into one another, to slice, to part, to recompose and eventually create new sectional conditions. In this space of intersectional forces, old data becomes potent again, dormant images awake just before they indeed intersect with others and intensely change. Our work resists the use of the metaphor; in that we do not aim for the transposition of older concepts and tradition to a present architecture. Instead we aim for instilling new substance through the intersection and replay of old form; like a musician plays an ancient melody instilling this with new significance as he plays the notes.

Deleuze suggests the possibility for memory to be an active creative process. We use our drawings to excavate previously unseen memory in a landscape of current and historic imagery to form new embankments and guide possible streams of thought. Like most pictures, the imagery we choose to retrace hold implicit qualities of duration; a latent certainty of continuity. When we look at a photograph, study the instilled moment, we know something happened before and after that photo was taken. In fact we look at the picture with this exact knowledge. This concealment of information generates its magnificence; providing meaning to that-what-is by means of that-what-is-not (visible). One could say this to entail the performative nature of the medium of photography; in that the image can act as décor against which new memory is to be constructed by the onlooker. The still image is keeping still for a moment or indeed is keeping a moment still. It is holding back and continuously speaks of it's holding. The exact knowledge of this holding is of no importance, not to us. Essential to the performance of the image is for it to allow an audience, through a responsive consciousness, to coauthor the photograph's meaning.

The act of drawing - the retracing of the image – aims at the consolidation of this responsive consciousness; recording décor through the act of drawing as one expands in the image only to enter a state of perception taking place in what Deleuze describes as pure-past; a space in which all past drifts simultaneously and lines are allowed to intersect and correlate indiscriminately. The nature of such memory constructs differs in our work. *The Gate Drawings* in the first instance negotiate time linearly. A multiple of moments are overlaid for the drawing to gain thickness and mass as if attaining architectural solidity, while lines notate the deconstruction of a city gate. The drawing of this collapsing gate, wants to make visible a space released from physical constraint

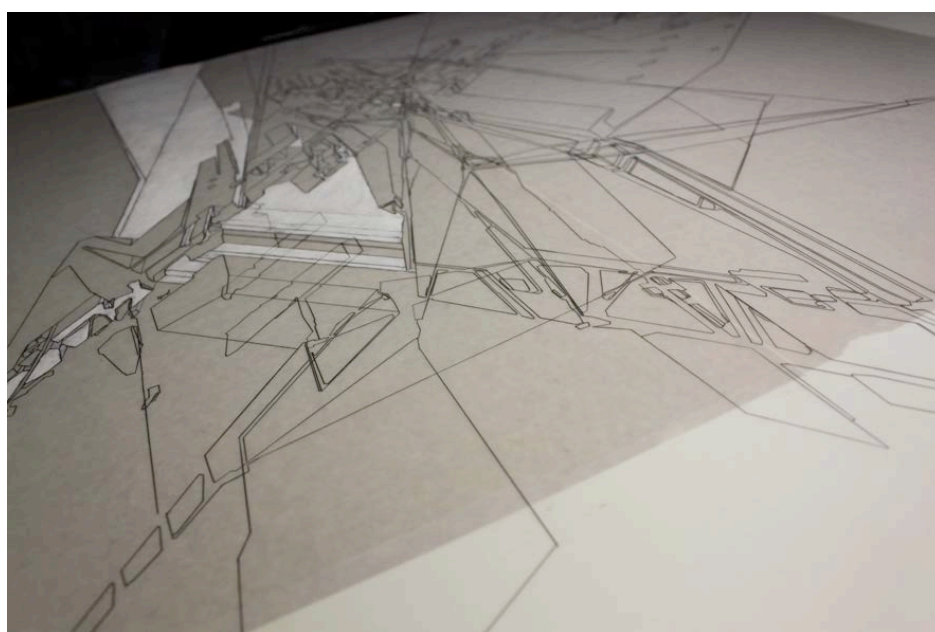
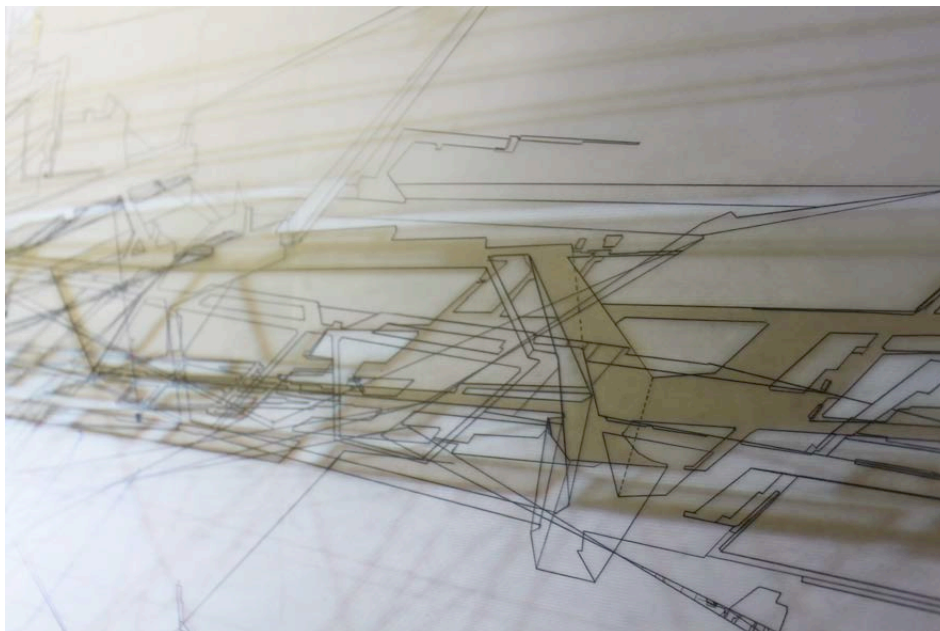


Fig 1; The Gate Drawings by Architecture Project, 2013: drawing historical traces to define new field conditions

and describe a metaphysical unlocking of a structure's resistance. The stonework of the city gate, once a majestic volume, is now changed, its material integrity discharged and a new spectacle of undoing comes into play. As such, the construct of time is altered from linearity to what Bergson describes as duration. *The Keepers Cenotaph* follows a similar path of notating forces in time however follows an almost reversed methodic trajectory. The forces accumulatively drawn in *The Gate Drawings* allow for the construction of a specific consciousness of time where *The Keepers Cenotaph* starts with assuming a specific consciousness of time in order to enable the depiction of certain type of forces. In both projects, this specific consciousness of time refers to the idea of a simultaneous-ness of all time past through the present. The practice of depicting forces trails a discourse which addresses the transitory moment between the representation of objects such as columns, porticos and freezes to the drawing of forces such as arching, holding, falling, cutting, entering, etc.

THE AUTONOMOUS OBJECT

We have until now explained our interest in architectural history vis-à-vis contemporary practice as a meandering between two opposing concepts; models we have borrowed from restoration and renovation practice. As previously explained [7] we position ourselves between a searching for absolute authenticity (when dealing with historical sites) through the reconciliation of a material past and relative authenticity allowing current socio-cultural parameters to impact the identity of the renewal of a historical site. This indeed explains an attendance to the already existing stone landscapes of ruin but does not clarify the formal language applied when we design new architecture. Understanding the deceptiveness of historical rhetoric, capable of performing a profound yet dangerous political swagger, our working methods escape the supremacy of written transcripts and favor the use of the pictorial; the image as self-determining object. As such, our work does not reference old ideals symbolically. We trace the literal form of old form through a process of multiple reiterations and repetitions. Drawings are transposed onto one another to allow lines to interfere and create new sectional conditions permitting architectural form of unforeseen complexity; a grammaticism of collisions and compressions to eventually expand in time.

Ideas on the cultural implications of form can be traced through multiples of debates and opposing theoretical strata. On the one end of the theoretical spectrum we find self-confirming discourses of form making through sets of pre-defined cultural operations. Examples of such operations would be a Classist Architecture based on Roman ideals. On the other end of the spectrum we find languages of pure formal abstraction detached

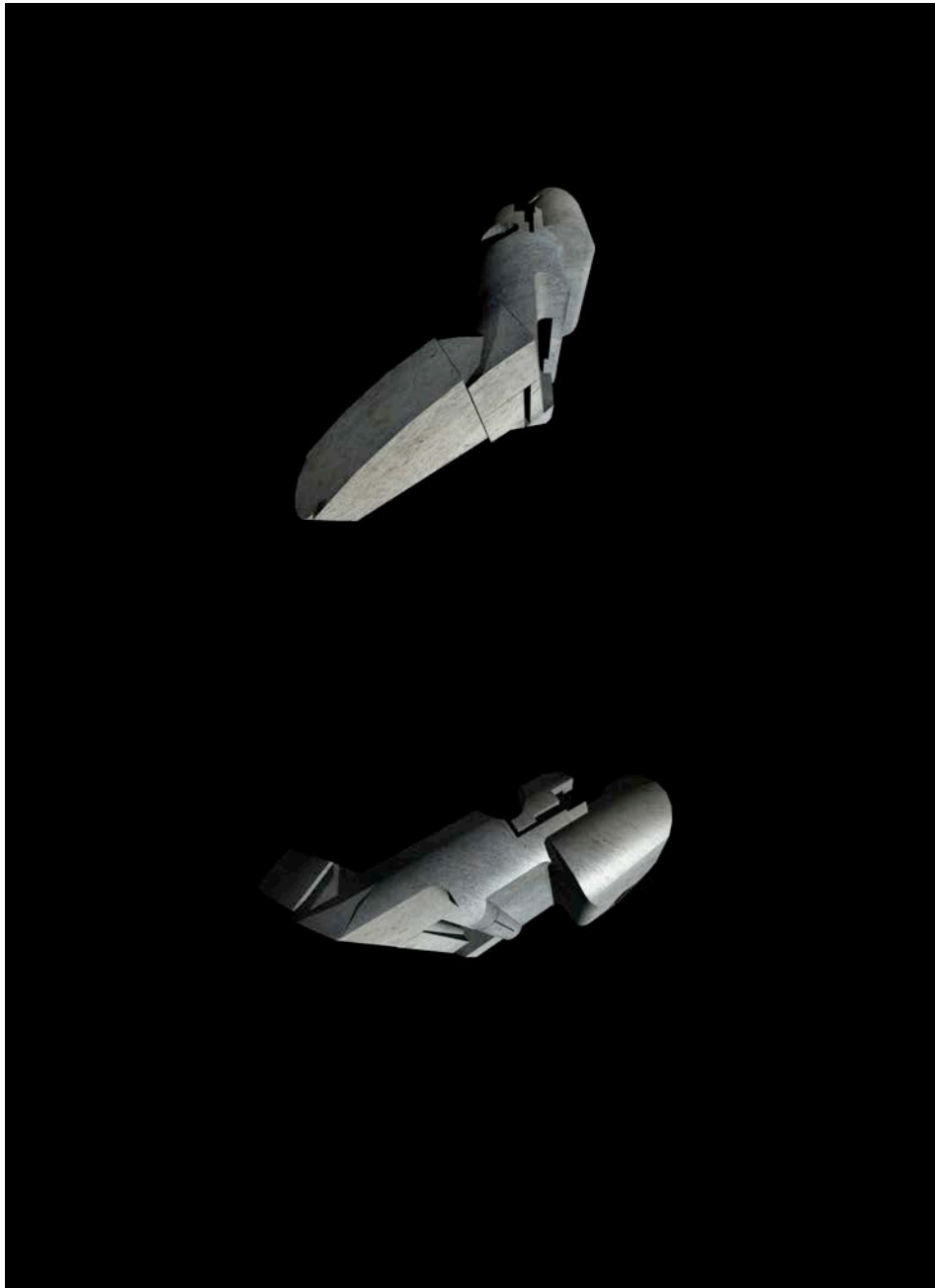


Fig 2; The keepers Cenotaph by Architecture Project, 2013: drawing historical traces as part of a process of recollection.

from the contingencies of place and history such as the 5 points of modernism in early 20th century architecture. We aim for a positioning between these two appearing oppositions by indeed remembering history through a process of repetition (and thus change) allowing the autonomy of an abstract formal system to develop and instill a space of critical displacement, something we explain in more depth at a later stage. Important is however to identify the difference between the role of a designer and the role of a cultural historian, for example, with regards to positioning oneself against the historic architectural object. As designers we do not negate the implicit cultural value of a historic formal language and the significance of its form as expressions of its cultural values. We do not negate the correspondence between a previous culture and its architecture however would find it problematic if this retrospective viewing would be a lone theoretical route taken to qualify the historic object. Because if this would be the case all historic architecture could merely be seen as completed and instilled in time past, which we have explained in the above as impossible. Nor do we believe in an alternative were the absence of historical concern would clear the way for a practice in pure conceptual space where architecture is conceived as autonomous objects by means of contained sets of formal operations. With our practice we position ourselves equidistant from both ends of this theoretical spectrum and work towards historically insinuated architecture by using semi-autonomous formal systems of repetition. As such we ponder as children of our time, fascinated by the role of the image as it drives the mediated city and its architecture. It was sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel who described the chaotic metropolis in the first half of the 20th century; *“the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates”* [8]. He also described this to stand at the basis of certain indifference by bystanders and architects alike; symptomatic of a voluntary cognitive castration to survive the chaos. We see our work as an attempt to contemplate on the vitality, the ambiguities and disjunctures created by the metropolis as we stand at its crest. We pay tribute to Jean Arp and his comment: *“Dada wished to destroy the hoaxes of reason and to discover an unreasoned order”* [9] as we work through mediated methods of architectural production. Even if it is just to remind us, time and time again, we can only strive for a creation of architecture which cultural significance is inherently unresolved.

ALLOWING FOR ARCHITECTURAL FORMAL SYSTEMS TO DEVELOP AND INSTILL A SPACE OF CRITICAL DISPLACEMENT

In 20012 we completed the renovation of a 3-floor apartment in a grade II listed building at Stanhope Gardens, London. Here we combine a working method of

deploying pre-defined cultural operations with a strategy of formal abstraction. The interiors as presented to us by our client had entered a state of neglect and despair. Most of the interior had been damaged by unpleasant renovations over time. Our first course of action therefore was a gentle reconstruction of the Victorian formal language to reiterate the correspondence between a previous culture and its architecture. The predominant in-white reconstruction acknowledged the theatricality of the outcome. Newly designed program, such as kitchen, toilet, storage, etc, were designed as one large autonomous object. At the basis of its conception stood an abstract formal system; tracing implicit directionalities of the interior and allowing these to impact the geometry of the pre-defined autonomous object. This formal system was very much guided by the progression of qualitative changes, as contextual data started to collide with the object, allowing one set of parameters to impact the other. The resulting object is referred to as superfurniture and aims at instilling a space of critical displacement (fig 3). This happens on two levels. On a discrete level the superfurniture acts as a diagram communicating a geometry freed from archetypical clichés. On a more interconnected level, it stands aesthetically distant from the reconstructed surroundings even though its form is a direct result of tracing site-specific parameters. This uncoupling (from formal archetypes and surrounding aesthetics) allows us to experiment with an architectural vocabulary aimed at re-evaluating the cultural implications of its form.

In everyday life a given form, such as a table for example, allows us to establish connections between objects and the language we speak. With the design of the superfurniture we aim for a momentarily breaking of such connections for the user to reconfigure new associations and construct new meaning. The resulting geometry of the superfurniture wants to challenge existing interior typologies for the body to re-adjust and rediscover new possibilities in terms of spatial occupancy.

After its completion, this disjunctioned interior became the location for a film project aiming at the recording of this process of memory-formation, as explained in the above. With our film we condense the process of 'remembering' into a short instance, an occurrence we have called *chronotopos* or time-place, setting up a stage through which we can look for and indeed construct the previously unseen (fig 4).

The film holds three acts; the body first measures space by its physical presence yet a discourse of reflection during the second act starts to erode the duality between subject and object. During the third act the presence of both subject and object evolves to a point where mind and space become simultaneous. The three acts lead the viewer from a simulation of spatial perception defined in Cartesian terms (or conceived space) to a simulated consciousness where we engage with an emotional and spatial attribute of duration (or perceived space).

HERE WE ARE IN PAST-PRESENT

We dwell a massacre of global constitutions; a faraway land of ideals holding a spur of marvelous spectacles of advance and destruction. In this cityscape, resulting from an amassed mediated global condition; we aim for a re-evaluation of the way in which we assume emplacement. The spaces we design want to be in a persistent state of becoming, holding memory and allowing space for new memories to be constructed. This, when we face this gleaming brightness of a world becoming, we achieve by first placing the architectural project within the simultaneous-ness of all time past to allow the designing mind to expand and reach an a-priory space (of pure-past if you like) surpassing geographical locality and indeed allowing us to negotiate relational proximities of absolute vastness. These proximities are interchangeable and hold endless possibilities of conceptual and literal intersections. Within this space, projects accumulate traces up to the moment of contraction; where form is extruded from within a present-past. When such form is met for the first time we value a particular dual quality of a '*past-present*' and this in two directions. The first past-present holds a directionality from past to present, therefore making past present. Its antagonist holds a directionality from present to past positioning the present somehow outside its presence. It is 'here, within this dual force we aim to examine transitory moments in the architectures we develop to indeed allow compositions of duration through observed historical experiential spatial qualities.



(fig 3) Stanhope Gardens by Architecture Project, 2012, London



(fig 4) A Chronotopos by Architecture Project, 2014, Architecture Biennale Venice

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